Ill Met By Moonlight

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Ill Met By Moonlight

by TigerPrawn

Summary

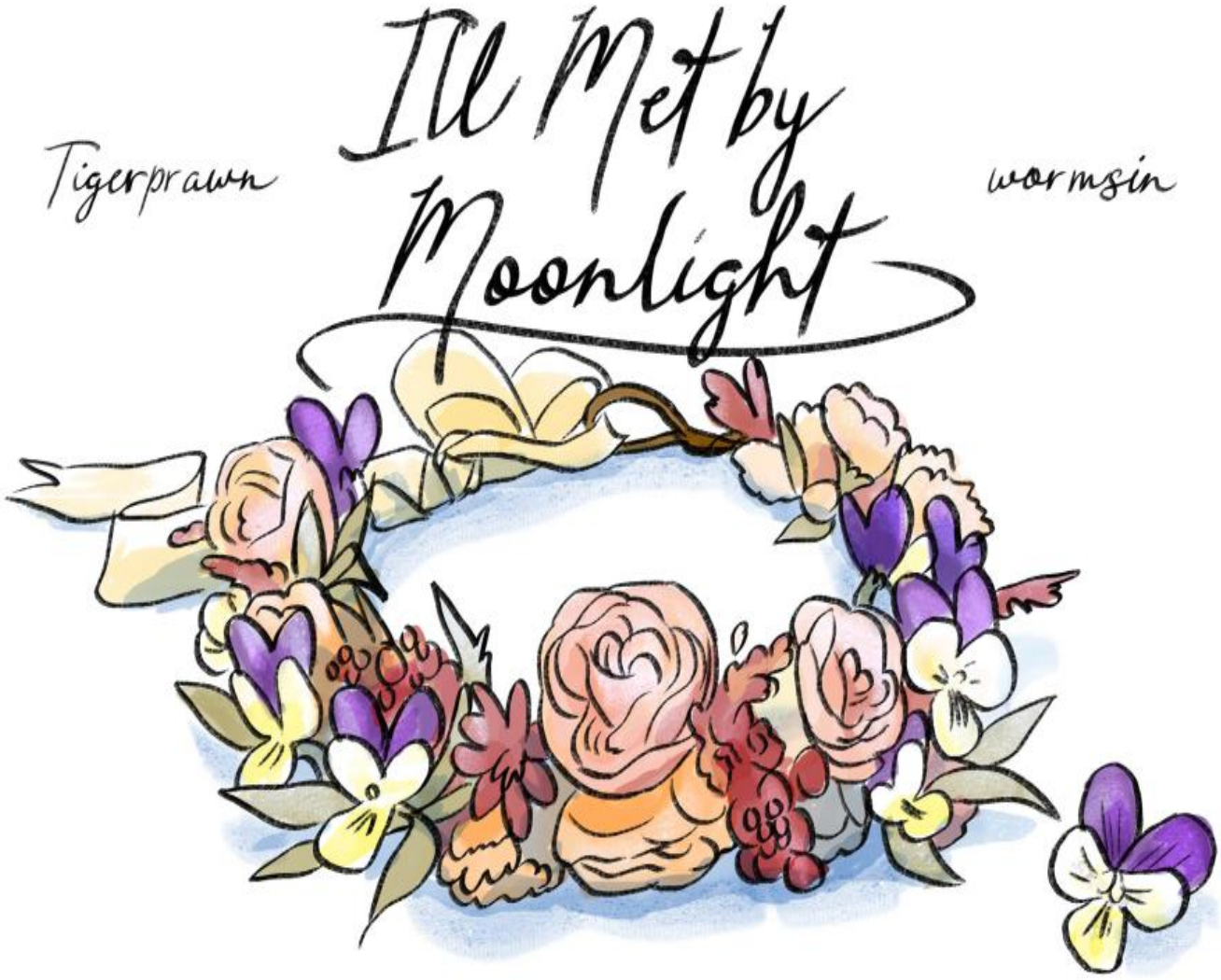
The Mortal Duke is to marry and the fairies have descended to the Palace Woods for the felicitous occasion. Unfortunately that means the alpha and omega Kings of the Fairies are bound to run into each other and continue their centuries old feud. This can only result in strong words, manipulation, and a complete farce that has their respective retinues rolling their eyes. But perhaps this time, with the fate of a would-be daughter on the line, the scene is set for a happy ending…

Notes

My entry for the MHBB - with amazing art by my wonderful pinch hitter Wormsin!

dramatis personae

Hannibal ~ Alpha King of Fairies
Will ~ Omega King of Fairies
Adam Goodfellow ~ A Puck
Elias Bottom ~ A Disagreeable Mortal
Katz ~ Will's Scout
Abigail Hobbs ~ A Changeling Child
Margot Verger, Jimmy Price, Brian Zeller, Alana Bloom ~ Mortal Lovers



Prologue

Night. The Palace Wood.

Adam smirked as he spied a scout he knew of old. One of the Omega King's retinue, come to rest in this gathering of their kin and drink the sweet and fermented nectar. The day had already been interesting enough - the mortal Duke was getting married, everyone was abuzz, and some odd townsfolk were assembling a play. It was a strange and balmy night.

“How now, spirit! Whither wander you?” he asked, taking another long sup at the acorn cup.

She looked over and rolled her eyes at him, her little cat-like ears twitching in annoyance amongst the flowers in her dark, flowing hair. “Over hill, over dale, through bush, through brier, over park, over pale, through flood, through fire, I do wander everywhere.”

Katz dropped onto the stump opposite him, causing a small plume of the dust of the road to rise from her harried person. She took up the bottle of nectar and poured a cup of her own before swigging it back in a way that made Adam smile. “My lord comes this way,” she finally summarised. “The Omega King.”

Adam cocked his brow and shook his head, much more amusement than ill feeling. “The Alpha King keeps his revels here tonight. His omega should not come within his sight.” Adam chuckled the warning. Katz shook her head with clear exasperation.

Their feud was almost as ancient as they were. Of course, the subject matter appeared to change, but the underlying reason remained the same, as far as Adam could tell. Not that he would ever speak of it, for he would likely lose his tongue.

The latest of the quarrels had arisen when the Omega King decided to take as his attendant a lovely changeling child - Abigail. The Omega King had wanted her for his retinue, seeing that she was in need of the kindness he could give. But her mortal father - angered at this perceived theft, instead slit her throat so that no one could have her.

But his mortal blade was no match for fae magic - dark and blood soaked as it was. And now she lived a quiet life of peace with the fairies. Sleeping in flower beds and dining on the flesh of the beasts that stalked the woods.

And Hannibal was jealous.

Perhaps not jealous enough to slit her throat anew, but certainly the Alpha King wanted her for himself, or rather wanted to take her from his would-be-mate. To take the reminder that they were yet to bond and Will was yet to carry children of his own that Hannibal might plant within his womb. In truth, as far as Adam could tell, Hannibal was angered by the fact that the Omega King dared take a surrogate in place of a child that the alpha might have sired on him - had they not been so ridiculous.

It was a farce.

Daily, nay hourly, Adam rolled his eyes at the brooding of his lord. As Will placed crowns of flowers upon the sweet child’s head and made her all his joy, Hannibal glowered in his jealousy when his spies reported this to him. For they had not seen each other’s person for many moons hence.

And now the Duke was to marry, and in these small palace woods it was inevitable the kings would meet, with not enough time spent apart to yet cool their ire over the changeling. They would come and witness the wedding with all their bile and anger, and as always, both would become all the more sour.

“Either I mistake your shape and making quite, or else you are that shrewd and knavish sprite Adam Goodfellow: are not you he? That mischievous fool? They call you sweet Puck? Are not you

he?" Katz narrowed her eyes with a mischief that he recognised, and her ears twitched but a little, facing forward to him as though in accusation.

"You speak it right. I am that merry wanderer of the night. I jest to Hannibal and make him smile." He began to wax lyrical on this abundant talent he had, but then he heard the telltale sound of the retinue he knew so well. "Here comes Hannibal."

"And here my King." Katz glanced to the other end of the clearing in which the festivities sat, where the Omega King's royal procession was arriving under the blanket of night.

She was right. Both kings were upon them.

"Well, shit," Adam lamented.

Scene One

Night. A Grove in the Palace Wood.

The woods sparkled - a good mixture of dew drops and fairy dust coating the darkness. The trees were so close together as to almost block the sun entirely, and Will could not have been more delighted with the coolness this offered.

Midsummer fast approached and the world seemed to be going mad with the heat. The mortals, a strange folk that were often little more than irritants, had begun to prove entertaining in their idiocy. They were all in love, of course, summer being the best time for this, and fairly tied themselves in knots over it.

It was fantastically amusing.

And it was at times like this, that Will felt perhaps fate had been kind in his and Hannibal's lack of bond. He certainly had no wish to be lost to the madness of love as others were. Though, despite this, the fact also annoyed him.

The Alpha King of the Fairies was *his* alpha in all but bond and had been for centuries longer than he could often remember. The years blurred here and there, especially those without Hannibal. The times when they *were* together everything seemed to slow down and he remembered acutely every moment in vivid detail. And he remembered with equal clarity that Hannibal then left. Every time.

He had not seen Hannibal in a good age and the smugness Will felt at never having bonded with the damn cad lasted all through each day, until sundown - when he missed the warmth next to him in his bed.

He thought of Hannibal taking others to his bed. He thought of how he would inevitably do the same for comfort, entertainment and revenge. And then they would return to each other and nothing would have changed.

The first time they had loved each other, Hannibal had courted him beautifully for a century, then made love to him in the deep woods. It seemed unspoken that the next time they came together Hannibal would knot him, bite him and bond him. But that time never came. Instead Hannibal had mistaken words that Will, on reflection, perhaps should not have said. And a rift split them.

No, they would never bond - never be truly mated. He would never bear Hannibal's children, but the connection they had never waned, and with words dipped in honey and spite, they would seduce each other over and over. They would lie together and whisper sweet words. Renew their knowledge of each other's bodies and how exquisitely they fit together. But come morning, they would remember their eternal discourse and be enemies once more.

As they had both taken other lovers over time, Will had settled on an idea. The truth: that Hannibal had never intended a bond at all. Because, of course, if they bonded they would be unable to invite others into their beds. Out of spite, Will had no intention of being as physically lonely as he was otherwise, every time Hannibal disappeared again. And Hannibal, he knew, would never stop bedding others long enough to consider the bond he had once idly mentioned.

Yes, that was the truth, Will knew. Though he often had to bury the contrary thought that plagued him - that this was all a misunderstanding. His gift of intuition - the empathy - he felt, could be misled by his petty feelings where Hannibal was concerned. It was easier to judge Hannibal by the alpha's actions rather than by his own feelings.

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The summer storm broke in the palace woods. Flashes of lightning made clear the way to the glade he had chosen for his encampment. Will sat lazily in his ornate litter, his very soul soothed by the gentle rocking and the cooling winds that pulled at the gossamer hangings. It was a relief given by the timely storm that would, for a short while at least, cool the rising heat of the summer.

A pleasant hour for a journey. Were it not for the misfortune of happening upon Hannibal.

Will's heart had thudded and his jaw had clenched in equal parts elation and ire, as he heard the loud and brash tone of his alpha's aide, his jester - Adam Goodfellow, Sweet Puck - clearly trifling with one of his retinue.

He heard her chuckle, as Adam continued with his nonsense, his words floating past the curtains that Will now wished deeply were thick enough to hold back the bluster.

"...And then the whole choir hold their hips and laugh, and waxen in their mirth, and neeze and swear! A merrier hour was never wasted there."

Before the fool had chance to continue and before Will's aide had chance to embarrass herself by falling for the mischief maker, Will pulled back the gossamer to reveal the scene before him.

There in the woods, before a lively party of woodland folk, was a clearing. The circle of trees allowed the evening sunlight to bathe all things therein in a warm glow. The coolness of the rest of the woods was lost and the only thing Will could say in its favour was that it would allow an excellent view of the full moon.

In that glade, Hannibal sat on a throne fashioned from a fallen oak that was twisted with ivy and liberally bestowed with more fairy dust than even he might make on a good day. He was clothed so similarly he might have been lost in the foliage were he not lit by the sun streaming through the trees. It caused a glitter on his crown of golden leaves, as well as the copious fairy dust.

Will rolled his eyes as his litter drew near the Alpha King - it wasn't even the most pompous Will had ever seen the fairy. He motioned for the curtains to be drawn back but made no move to make a formal greeting, instead reclining against soft cushions of gold and bronze.

Will noted as Hannibal’s eyes travelled over his form, taking in the robe he wore, spun of spiders’ webs. Too warm for anything else, it was pinned in such a way so as not to reveal his entire nudity.

The Alpha King licked his lips, raking his eyes back up to Will’s.

"Ill met by moonlight, proud omega." Hannibal crooned the words in that way he had that made Will both shiver and roll his eyes anew. “Who do you present yourself to in such attire, for I know it is not my company you seek.”

Hannibal quirked a brow at him and Will took a breath so as not to rise to the bait of this argument. He would play the alpha off instead.

"What, jealous Hannibal! Fairies, skip hence - I have forsworn his bed and his company," Will replied, waving his hand as though to dismiss Hannibal rather than his own entourage. They certainly didn't move, knowing this game of old.

"Tarry, rash wanton. Am I not thy lord?" Hannibal's grin was all teeth as he attempted to bait Will further. Will did roll his eyes then - yet again.

"I have thus far eluded your bond. Or you have failed to make it." Will's reply was saltier than he had intended. He didn't want to stoke his bitter feelings about that situation. He was certainly sure that Hannibal had not once thought about the limbo he had placed Will in by giving him neither a bond nor freedom - taking others to warm his bed was one thing, but Will would never be able to bond another. “We both come to grace the mortals, perhaps we can be civil throughout?”

“Civil?” Hannibal scoffed. “Whilst you, in your incivility, keep from me the child I wanted for my own?”

Will’s jaw clenched and his features darkened, the clouds above drew closer and matched the blackness in his eyes. The sun no longer lit the glade as Will’s ire threatened to bring upon them a storm.

“These are the forgeries of jealousy! And never, since the middle summer's spring have we met on hill, in dale, forest or mead, by paved fountain or by rushy brook, or in the beached margent of the sea. You shun me Hannibal so you shun her, as she is mine - as I have made her so. You want her just to spite me. We could have been her fathers.”

The words were rash and came out in anger, and for a moment Will regretted them - that moment was filled with a brief flash of emotion over the Alpha King’s countenance. Some hard and sad look that didn’t suit the angles of his face.

“We can be her fathers, we-” Hannibal cut off his own response before he could say something he would no doubt later regret. He straightened upon his throne, eyes now as dark as Will’s and the clouds he had brought above them.

Will let out a breath, trying to exhale frustration and anger with it, only in part successful. “Set your heart at rest. The fairy land buys not the child of me. I will not part with her.” In the moment of silence after, the clouds began to dissipate and the glade once more was a place of light.

The alpha appeared to wish the subject changed, clearing his throat before asking, “How long within this wood intend you stay?”

There was something in the question that made Will long to answer truthfully - that he would stay forever in Hannibal's company if only he would allow it - if he would swallow his pride and make things right with Will. But he was himself too proud and Hannibal offered too little.

"Perchance till after the wedding-day. You're welcome in our company," Will offered, an attempt to make peace if only for this short time - it would be less tedious that way. It was too hot for all this drama. "If not, shun me, and I will spare your haunts," Will allowed.

"Give me my daughter and I will go with thee." Hannibal furrowed his brow and spoke the words darkly.

Will felt his anger rise anew; clearly Hannibal wished to fight. Will would blame the heat or the full moon, or just the fact that the alpha was an insufferable cur, for the flash of anger Hannibal's words brought him. He grit his teeth and spat his reply.

"Not for thy fairy kingdom. Fairies, away! We shall chide downright, if I longer stay."

*

Hannibal watched his omega leave, his jaw tightening at the thought - the knowledge - that Will was not *his* omega. His lip curled into a snarl. It sometimes seemed as though he willfully misunderstood. In the beginning, centuries ago, they had seen each other so clearly. Those years of wooing, until the omega honoured him with his love. They had known each other so well that night.

Or he thought they had. But then the morning had dawned and Hannibal felt deeply that Will had no true interest in him, beyond the night of passion they had shared. It had been their first spat, and from there had followed a million more, over and over in each meeting, that took them further apart from each other.

He had to admit that with the growing distance and passing of time, his bitterness had grown too. As, apparently, had Will's. He knew his actions over the ward - Abigail - were petty, but it seemed one of the few ways to get the omega's attention these days. If she had been the true fruit of Will's womb it would have been he that placed her there and she would by all rights be his. If Will wished her as a surrogate, then she was his also. Or so Hannibal would argue - as much for the sake of riling the omega for his own amusement.

Petty, it was true. Perhaps even childish. But he could argue well that it was nothing Will had not brought down upon himself!

"Well, go thy way. Thou shalt not from this grove till I torment thee for this injury," Hannibal muttered after Will's receding retinue.

He realised Adam was watching him with a knowing look, despite the continued revelries taking place. Damn the sprite!

"Puck, come hither," Hannibal called him closer, waiting as he took a knee before the throne. "Remember that rock by the sea where the mermaids rode on the back of dolphins as they sang?"

Adam nodded. "I recall."

“I saw there, flying between the cold moon and the earth, Cupid - armed. I saw him let loose his arrow. As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts. And I marked where that bolt of Cupid fell. It fell upon a little western flower, before milk-white, now purple with love's wound. Go there now, fetch me that flower.”

Adam raised a brow at him. “What mean you to do?” His smile was mischievous. Perhaps he thought that Hannibal made mischief instead? Instead? Instead of a manipulation.

Over the years there had been many manipulations and none had worked. Will had manipulated too, in his turn - a game they played between them. A battle of something like wills, back and forth but neither of them ever won. They were always too evenly matched.

“Take from the flower the nectar. The juice of it on sleeping eyelids laid will make alpha or omega madly dote upon the next live creature that it sees. Fetch me this herb.”

Adam’s grin was knowing and perhaps he thought that Hannibal meant to use it to finally trap Will into love. But that was not his way - he would take Will willing and no other way. Abigail, she was a different matter.

He wasn’t simply being petty. No, he was perhaps also being cruel.

The child had been denied to him when they should, as Will had uttered cruelly, have been her fathers together. She was the child that Will had denied him with these centuries of denying his bond, and so he would take her, so that Will could finally understand the lonely pain he caused.

“I'll put a girdle round about the earth, in forty minutes!” Adam replied as he stood and made off, leaving a flurry of small leaves in his wake.

Hannibal swallowed, a cold shiver over his skin.

It had come to this?

He would anoint Will’s eyes once he slept, and the next thing then he waking looked upon - be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull - he would pursue it with the soul of love. A love sickness that only Hannibal could cure, and only in return for Abigail.

A slight whisper of doubt settled over Hannibal, but was quickly gone again as the trees parted in that unnatural way they had when disturbed by mortal folk.

Two mortals strode into the glade, no care for the disruption they caused.

Hannibal pulled a shadow over himself, to overhear their conference.

Scene Two

The Wood. Here waits Hannibal in a grove.

Hannibal stalked the grove, his throne now gone and the revellers sleeping where they sat, half-imbibed cups before them.

When his faithful Puck returned, Hannibal was not disappointed by his service. He brought, as required, the nectar he sought, and wore a crown woven of the purple flowers he had drained.

Hannibal quirked a brow at it and Adam. Though Hannibal was sure this had not been his intent all along, Adam removed the flower crown and held it out to his king as he sank to one knee - crown in one hand, vial of nectar in the other.

"I have done as you requested, sire."

Hannibal inclined his head to show his approval as he took both items, hesitating only a moment before settling the crown onto his own head, circling his own gold leaf crown as though made to fit it.

"Now I have further to task you."

Adam cocked his head and raised a brow. "You wish me to administer this to your king?"

Hannibal shook his head and waved a dismissive hand. "No, that task is mine." The words came out in a growl. Regardless of anything else, no one would touch Will, not even on his own errand. If someone else were to do this to his omega he would rip their heart out through their throat and feast upon it before their dying eyes.

He was unsure, from Adam's expression, whether he said any of that aloud, but even so his servant remained bowed before him. Hannibal jerked his hand to indicate Adam should stand, talking with him conspiratorially.

"Whilst you were gone I was treated, as an audience, to the drama of some mortals wandering these woods." Hannibal closed the vial in both hands and then parted them to reveal there were now two identical vials - both half full. He handed one to Adam. "Take this and do as I ask. There is a noble lady who passed through here, in love with a disdainful youth. Seek them out and anoint his eyes with the nectar, so that the next thing he espies may be the lady."

"You wish to play with the mortals, sire?" Adam asked, though there was no judgement, that much was certain from the amused glint in his eyes.

He shook his head. "I... I wish to..." Strangely words failed him. He often used others for his amusement, but perhaps his situation with Will was making him soft to the plight of others. "I am... interested in their happy ending."

Adam raised a brow again and smiled in such a knowing way that it had Hannibal dismissing him.

"Be gone, Adam Goodfellow. Do as I have asked."

With a chuckle Adam was gone. *The little shit.*

Hannibal knew where Will's retinue had come to rest - a bank of a stream whereon the wild thyme blow and oxlips and nodding violet grow. It was a place preferred by his sometime lover and more than once over the years he had bedded Will there, over-canopied with luscious woodbine, sweet musk-roses and eglantine. He remembered well waking in such beautiful surroundings and finding it eclipsed by the beauty of his love-worn mate.

Not his mate.

Hannibal's fists curled and his chest grew tight. No, not his mate and never would he be. He would not force his bond upon the omega, but he would have of him that which he might use to his own

ends. The child that served Will no purpose. He would have Abigail Hobbs, his to command. His to cherish as if his own.

Hannibal walked steadily through the woods, a well-known path to him even if he had not used it in many a year. As he drew close he heard Will's joyous tone and found he felt slighted by the lack of sadness in the omega. That he was happy when Hannibal was not present and not dwelling upon the loss of his company. All the more reason to spur him to his action - to play this cruel trick and reap the reward come the end.

Hannibal watched from behind the embankment as Will's retinue made merry their camp.

"Come, now a roundel and a fairy song. Then, for the third part of a minute, hence." Will laughed the words and then ended in a yawn as he climbed into the bed of white blossoms that had been laid out for him, his silk-spun robe perfectly matched. "Keep back the clamorous owl that nightly hoots and wonders at our quaint spirits. Sing me now asleep. Then to your offices and let me rest."

As some went about their business quietly, others drew near - singing in little more than a whisper as they lulled the omega to sleep.

Hannibal's heart clenched. He had done this too and he knew it well.

He knew very well the nightmares that plagued the beautiful king's mind - the cruel punishment for the intuition he had been granted, negating it as a gift. He had done this himself on the nights they had bedded together. In the very beginning of their acquaintance when they had lived more than a century in each other's company before they had even laid sight on each other's sex. Hannibal had sought new songs and melodies from all fairies and mortals alike with which to lull his would-be mate. Soothing those sweet lines on his brow until he fell into a slumber that would have only been deeper if they'd made love first. He would sleep tucked against Hannibal, his face pressed to the scent gland at Hannibal's throat - keeping him calm and slumbering. Even after their spat Hannibal had done this many a night after their passions had been sated.

As Will drifted into sleep the fairies moved away, going about their business and allowing Hannibal to sneak closer. As he had many times before, he climbed into Will's bed and lay out next to him, such a familiar sensation as their bodies pressed together.

He removed the flowered crown from his own head and placed it upon Will's - a breathtaking sight - a vision in white and purple. The alpha trailed his finger down Will's beautiful jaw, moving it softly to his lips, so lightly as not to wake him.

It would be so easy to kiss him, but he could never take anything the omega didn't give, and the giving had become infrequent.

With a sigh, Hannibal pulled the stopper from the vial and pressed some of the nectar onto his fingertips before pressing them lightly to Will's eyelids.

He reminded himself of the rebuttals, Will's refusals and his denial of Hannibal's request for Abigail. Clenching his jaw as he tried to muster every pain Will had caused him. Every justification he had for this.

"What thou seest when thou dost wake, do it for thy true-love take. Love and languish for his sake - be it ounce, or cat, or bear, Pard, or boar with bristled hair - in thy eye that shall appear when thou wakest, it is thy dear." Hannibal clenched his jaw. "Wake when some vile thing is near."

His tone was cruel as he forced the words out as a snarl.

Scene Three

Night. A Clearing near King Will's retinue.

The mortals found, and set right as King Hannibal had wished, Adam could congratulate himself on a job well done. The mortals now were under love's spell and he had a night to make merry.

As he made his way back to the grove in which he had left his King, Adam's attention was drawn by the mutterings of yet more mortals. The woods seemed to be alive with the damn things!

"What hempen home-spuns have we swaggering here, so near the cradle of the Omega King?"

Adam kept to shadows and studied the folk gathered, costumes and props enough between them and talk of a play for the Duke's wedding. He couldn't but help a smile - an entertaining entertainment to pass his time. He settled to watch and drew out a hip flask to further enhance his enjoyment.

As the company made their play, Adam's eye drawn by one they called Elias, a weaver by trade. He was amusing but not talented, even less than the rest of them, though his manner was enjoyable. There was a bluster about him that seemed very full of confidence and yet none at all at the same time. Rarely had Adam come across such an interesting mortal, and his shape was also not completely undesirable.

"Thisby, the flowers of odious savours sweet." Elias acted the words poorly, if it could be called such a thing as acting.

"No, no. Odours, odours!" The man was corrected by another in his company.

"Odours! I know, I am not a simpleton," Elias huffed, looking affronted though he continued nonetheless. "Odours savours sweet. So hath thy breath, my dearest Thisby dear.
But hark, a voice! Stay thou but here awhile, and by and by I will to thee appear."

"A stranger Pyramus than e'er played here," Adam chuckled to himself, looking at the gangly youth that played opposite his interesting friend.

Adam was surprised to see the man stalk towards him, unsure whether it was the direction of the play or his mood, until he reached the treeline and picked something up. Adam moved around to better see and smiled at the strange and ugly bull mask the man lifted.

"A bull is it?" Adam grinned.

"Who is that there?" the man asked as Adam approached, the mask fitting ill and obscuring his vision.

"I only offer help." Adam smiled and spread his hands in placation.

"Quince is that you? Who made this mask? It is ill-fitting and uncomfortable. I thought we would be professionals! How am I to look the part of a bull in this?" Elias grumbled.

Adam suppressed a laugh at the fool, a terrible and mischievous idea forming. "Oh, I can help you with that."

*

Elias was a pitiful thing as a mortal, but as the beast Adam had made of him, he was wonderfully woeful.

After he had frightened all the other mortals gathered from the woods, he sat in the clearing - head in his hands - and wept. Full, wet tears rolled down from large bovine eyes and each made Elias wail all the more.

“Why do they run away? This is a knavery of them, as if I am as dumb as an ox,” he sobbed.

Adam stood beyond the clearing still, waiting for events to unfold, and had been amused at first, though now he had some compassion for the cow that sat weeping. It was poor of his fellow mortals to forsake him, even if it worked better for his scheming.

Adam took a deep breath and exhaled a heavy sigh, thinking he might abandon the merriment that had presented itself so beautifully. He fixed his resolve and stepped forward, trying not to be swayed by the tears into transforming Elias back and resting a mortal head upon his shoulders once more.

“Come this way,” Adam whispered, his voice echoing around. “Over here.” He threw his voice in that mischievous way he had, until Elias was on his feet and being led eagerly.

“I'll follow you, I'll lead you about a round,” Adam muttered, more to himself than to Elias, trying to keep his plan steady. “Through bog, through bush, through brake, through brier.
Sometime a horse I'll be, sometime a hound, a hog, a headless bear, sometime a fire.
And neigh, and bark, and grunt, and roar, and burn, like horse, hound, hog, bear, fire, at every turn.”

Elias followed on, even though he huffed at every word and muttered under his breath that the spirit guiding him was clearly an idiot or drunkard - or both - with such nonsensical ramblings.

And then the clearing broke into the embankment of the Omega King’s camp, and Adam knew there was no return from this plan.

“Here, sweet bull.” Adam allowed one last call to bring Elias to the bed of the omega. “Here you may rest.”

Unseeing of King Will, the bull-headed mortal sank down and leaned against the bed of blossoms, sniffling still.

“I see their knavery. They say I am bullish, they say all the time that I am over confident. But I don’t see that. I am the correct amount of confident. Bullish indeed!” Elias grumbled, though there was fear in his tone. “But I will not stir from this place, if they want to play silly games, I will have no part in it. Instead I shall sit here and sing, for I am a very good singer - I have been told often.”

The bull of a man thus began to sing and Adam grimaced. It was unpleasant and sure to wake the King, which of course was as he wished - even if that wish was not as heartfelt as it should be. It took him more than a moment to pinpoint why the idea bothered him so.

Foolish for a Puck to be jealous of the love about to be bestowed.

On a long drawn out note that sounded like the deep moo of a bovine, Will stirred.

“What angel wakes me from my flowery bed?” Will’s words were as sweet as the nectar in his eyes and Adam balked.

A moment of clarity - whilst he played this trick on mortal and king alike, he realised he had played it upon himself too. For now, the interesting fellow he might have liked to know better, though he be mortal and insufferable, he must now endure his being loved by another.

“Dammit,” Adam muttered under his breath, now too far for any to hear him, as he watched the scene unfold.

Will rose and stretched, a delicate motion, before he looked about him for a source of the continued braying of the terrible song. He finally found Elias at his bedside and Adam’s jaw clenched as Will drew back, a hand over his no doubt fluttering heart, utterly rapt.

“I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again. Mine ear is much enamour'd of thy note, so is mine eye enthralled to thy shape. And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me, on the first view to say, to swear, I do love thee,” Will declared with a heartfelt passion that made Adam just as sorry for the Alpha King as he was for himself.

“With good reason! I am a fine specimen, rarely appreciated.” Elias’s tone was all bluster once more. “And to say the truth, reason and love keep little company together nowadays!”

Will smiled. “Thou art as wise as thou art beautiful.” The omega’s hand caressed lightly down the side of the bull’s furred face.

Adam turned away from the scene, wishing to see no more for his own benefit, and for that of his King who would want all reported.

Scene Four

Dawn. The Wood. Enter Hannibal into that same grove near the embankment.

Hannibal had slept ill. His dreams had been plagued by thoughts of Will - his love wholly transferred to another in his stead. Someone who he would allow to become his bonded mate, as he should long ago have allowed of Hannibal.

He woke angry and frustrated, finding himself walking in a near daze toward that beautiful embankment that the Omega King had chosen as his to slumber in.

“I wonder if Will be awaked, then what it was that next came in his eye, which he must dote on in extremity,” Hannibal mused, trying to seem jovial in order to convince himself that he had not made the blunder he thought he might have. Will could have first espied a woodland creature of some sort, which would give some sport before the effects of the nectar were lifted. But what if Will first came upon a more likely prospect - a fairy who might make Will forget all that had been, and could be between them. He took a deep breath at the thought and let it out slowly.

Perhaps he had been too quick to trust his emotions in this folly?

He slowed a pace as he walked, less eager to discover the effect the nectar might have had and if it could mean the end of any hope where Will was concerned. He was barely moving forward at all

when Adam entered the grove.

“Adam! How now, mad spirit! What news of Will?” He tried to keep the sense of dread from his question.

Adam started, with a grin that settled ill within Hannibal, “The Omega King with a monster is in love.” Despite his grin there was something forced in it and Hannibal wondered if Adam too thought his actions too far. Or else he had concern for the monster, which - as ridiculous as the Puck could be - would be an even purer folly.

Adam cleared his throat before he continued, once more adopting that amused tone that, to one who knew him as well as his King, was not all it seemed.

“Near to his close and consecrated bower, while he was in his dull and sleeping hour, some mortals met to make a play, intended for the Duke’s wedding day. I made mischief with a bull of a man, that is... now more bull than man. The other mortals were afeared and deserted him to seek respite, and so I led him to the Omega King. So it came to be that next to his bed sat this fool, so Will waked and straightway loved a bull.”

Adam’s laughter was as forced as Hannibal’s.

“This falls out better than I could devise.” The words almost stuck in Hannibal’s throat. Surely, Will could not really love a bull in his place? Once the antidote was given, Will would no longer be so enchanted. Or so Hannibal hoped.

What could this bull give him that his own alpha could not?

He clenched his jaw and noted that Adam was studying him closely. Perhaps seeing the jealousy there, the concern that he might lose the love of the omega. A love he had always returned but failed to declare.

He was very close to admitting his mistake to the sprite, when those mortal lovers, whose quarrel he had asked Adam to resolve, happened, once more, into their grove.

"Stand close, this is that same mortal,” Hannibal noted as the man who had disdained the good Lady strode through the wooded glade.

Adam nodded as the Lady entered the grove in pursuit. “This is the woman, but not this the man.”

Hannibal was taken aback by his words, unable to query further as the mortals began to argue before them - not seeing them hidden in the shadows Hannibal pulled around them.

As they bickered and volleyed Hannibal’s eye fell upon Adam. With the mortals unable to hear, he sneered at his servant.

“What hast thou done? Thou hast mistaken quite and laid the love-juice on some true-love's sight. Of thy misprision must perforce ensue some true love turn'd and not a false turn'd true.” The words came out in an angry growl and Hannibal knew, given his lack of true interest in the mortals beyond idle interference, his frustrations lay elsewhere. He was of a mind to blame Adam for all that had happened - he should have refused to bring the nectar.

Adam frowned. “Then fate o'er-rules. I-”

“Just fix it!” Hannibal’s voice boomed in the grove, scattered birds from the trees that startled the mortals.

“I go, I go. Look how I go, swifter than arrow from the Tartar's bow,” Adam replied, biting words with a sour expression, before he moved off to seek the lovers and right his wrongs.

Hannibal let out a heavy sigh, pinching his brow and feeling overwrought. This was to be a time of merriment, all told. But Will had forced his hand, had he not? He had given Will a rare gift, and Will had not wanted it - and now centuries had passed compounding that slight. He should be done with the Omega King - finally tear the man from his gut and leave him aside once and for all.

Though he knew he could never do that.

“Whilst Adam is in his task employed, I'll to my King and beg his changeling child. And then I will his charmed eye release from monster's view, and all things shall be peace.”

Hannibal steadied his breath with a sigh and swallowed. Peace with Will was very unlikely, but he would have Abigail and settle for that.

His gut churned at the thought of the monster - the bull-headed mortal of Adam’s making - and the sweet and tender love he might be taking.

Scene Five

The Embankment. Here Will, with Elias, his bull’s head garlanded with a crown of purple flowers.

Will could not say why he loved the bull, but he loved him deeply and well. A much less complicated creature than the Alpha King, and much more agreeable. And yet, it was strange to wake with this love, having spent the night in dreams with Hannibal. He dreamt the alpha had lain with him and whispered words of love, stroked his face and placed the exact same flower crown he had awoken wearing. It must have been made by an exuberant sprite in his retinue. It tangled in his own modest crown and so he placed it on his new love’s head - adorning his horns so perfectly.

Elias - his love - was rude and blustering, but in such a way that was endearing to Will. And despite dreams of his truest love, Will knew that had the bull a knot and the ability to bond, then he would have been resolved there and then. He would have mated with the beautiful visage he had kissed gently through the early morning. Though he was not quite sure why.

He had never been enamoured of brutes before. Unless you could count Hannibal, he smiled to himself at the little joke before he soured at thoughts of his would-have-been mate. It would serve the alpha right if Will were to mate and bond with someone else. At this point it would possibly be the healthiest thing for the both of them, instead of existing in this cruel limbo. Unbonded but unable to truly pursue another.

Will let out a sigh, which perked the ears of his bovine companion.

“Come, sit thee down upon this flowery bed.” Will smiled and patted the blossoms he sat on. “While I thy amiable cheeks do coy, and stick musk-roses in thy sleek smooth head, and kiss thy fair large ears, my gentle joy.” Will purred the words, though there was a niggling feeling in his skull - this sort of language and affection felt almost alien. Was he not freely giving of his love like this usually?

No, that much he knew. Only with Hannibal. Only in those rare moments where there was peace between them - and they had grown few and far between.

Elias sat and released a heavy sigh himself.

“Are you not well my love?” Will asked. “Do I not give you every attention and affection?”

“You do,” Elias agreed, the word ending in a slight moo that jarred Will a little, as much as he loved the beast. “The fairies are rude. You ask them to attend me, but they balk when I ask them to scratch my ears. Such an easy task. Are they simpletons?” The bull-man’s tone was rude and accusatory, and despite Will having the utmost respect for his retinue, he found himself nodding in agreement.

“Let me do this for you.” Will hurried his words to assuage Elias’s hurt feelings, pulling the mortal down so that his head lay in his lap and Will was able to scratch both ears and the points where Elias’s horns erupted. "What, wilt thou hear some music, my sweet love?”

“I have a reasonable good ear in music,” Elias bragged in that way he had that, from anyone else, Will would not tolerate.

Will cleared his throat, trying to understand his own reasons for liking this bull, as they seemed to not be his own. He shook off the thought. “Or say, sweet love, what thou desirest to eat?”

“Truly, a peck of provender. I could munch your fine grass hereabouts. Methinks I have a great desire to a bolt of hay. Good hay, sweet hay, hath no fellow,” Elias replied, his tone a lecture that Will found himself nodding to, and yet his thoughts were drawn from the lush grass he had seen his lover eating to one of the many meals Hannibal had prepared in the past.

When Hannibal had been wooing him, the alpha had lovingly prepared such fine meals. Providing well, as any alpha might for a beloved omega. Will remembered fondly the time Hannibal served to him the heart of the last fairy to ever cross the omega. Garnished so finely.

Will’s mouth watered.

“I pray you, let none of your people stir me.” Elias’s blustered declaration startled Will back to the present. “I have an exposition of sleep come upon me.”

Will nodded dutifully. “Sleep thou, and I will wind thee in my arms.” He tenderly caressed Elias’s furred cheek. “Fairies, begone, and be all ways away.”

Will noted with curiosity the strange look that Katz gave him before being compelled to comply - as all fairies indentured to him were bound.

Will yawned, perhaps prompted by the bull’s slumber or tired from the excessive attentions of their acquaintance; his eyelids grew heavy.

“So doth the woodbine the sweet honeysuckle gently entwist, the female ivy so enrings the barky fingers of the elm.” Will wrapped his arms around the beast. “O, how I love thee! How I dote on thee!”

The last was said as a deep yawn before slumber took him.

*

Hannibal stole onto the embankment, none there but Will and his beast, slumbering in a bed of blossoms that the bull had no right to.

Except that Hannibal had given him that right the moment he had anointed Will's eyes. What a fool he had been to invite someone else into a bed that should have been wholly his. Even worse - the beast wore the flowered crown that he had placed on Will's head. He had wanted to see how he could fit beauty together, but now it was tainted by the beast - nestled around his thick horns.

Hannibal trembled with a frustrated anger he wished he could point in any direction other than at himself - only roused from it when he heard Adam approach.

Hannibal cleared his throat and screwed his resolve to the sticking point, forcing a cruel smile as he swept a hand over the scene.

"See'st thou this sweet sight? His dotage now I do begin to pity." Hannibal forced a laugh.

"Will you entreat he give up the changeling child to you now, sire? Perhaps he does not wish to have his sight released of the bull he has grown so fond of?" Again there was that strange tone to Adam, as though he were disdainful of the whole thing. A lover of mischief to a much higher degree than Hannibal, this seemed strange.

"Should I taunt him for my pleasure?" Hannibal asked but could say no further, because the question seemed easily answered.

"Sire?" Adam asked, his look of concern clear. "Are you well? It is unlike you to doubt yourself or any game of your creation."

"I am love sick," Hannibal admitted, startled then by Adam's laugh.

"You have been so for many a century now my lord." The sprite's chuckle felt like a release in Hannibal's own chest.

"I shall give him back his eyes and heart." Hannibal spoke with determination.

Adam nodded gravely. "And the changeling child?"

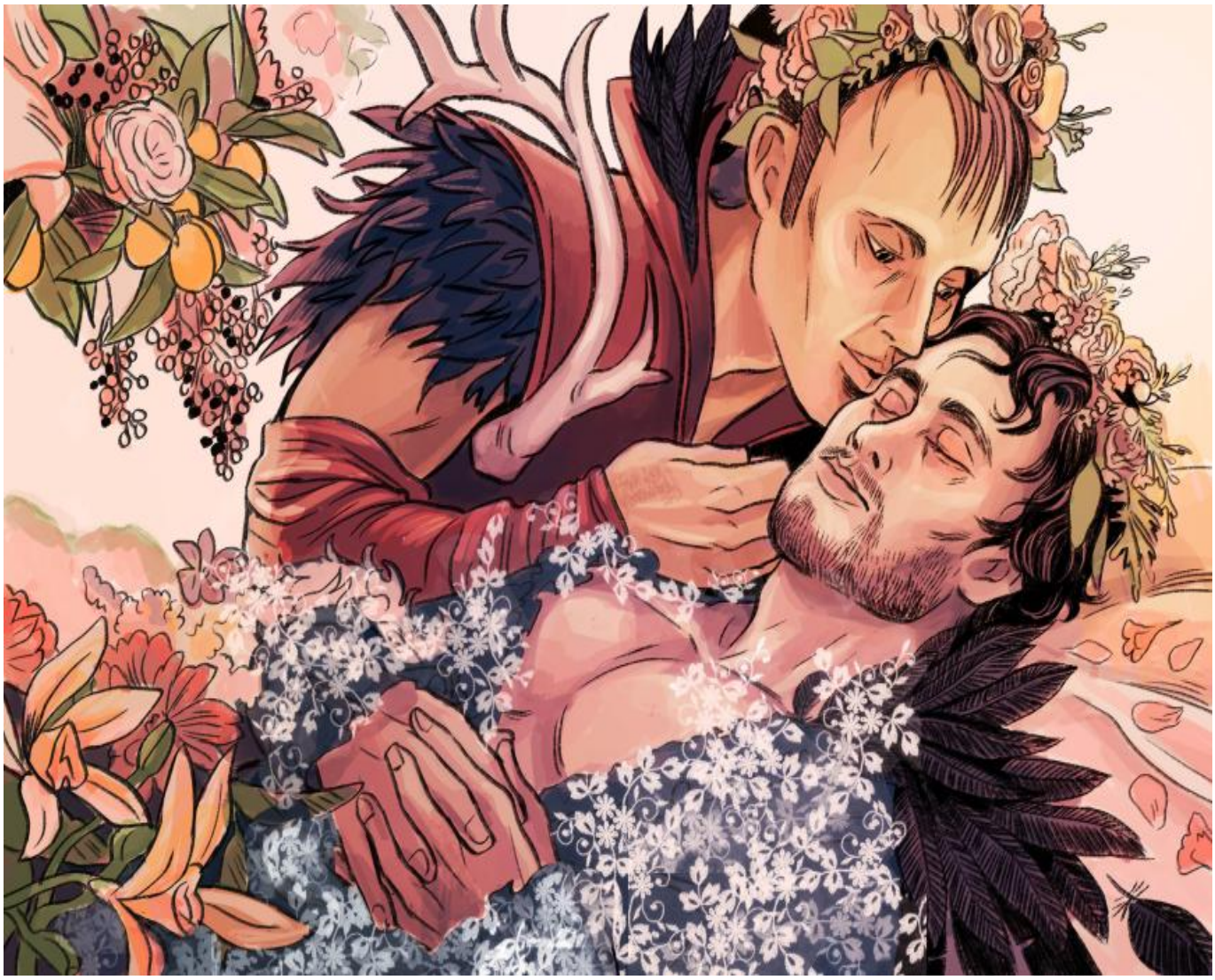
Hannibal let out a heavy sigh. "What is she to me but a pawn? The truth is…" He licked his lips, unsure whether to continue but knowing there was no way he could not. He waved a hand over to where Will lay. "My only weakness is my Omega King, and it is a weakness I would gladly bear if he would be wholly mine."

Adam seemed, uncharacteristically, at a loss for words at the confession. He clearly knew this, of course, but to hear his king speak it aloud must take a moment of consideration.

Hannibal let out a low chuckle. "I am undone by jealousy I myself have incited." He stalked with determination to the bower of blossoms in which Will had made his bed with the bull. He stroked a hand softly over Will's cheek, a shiver running over his own skin in turn.

"I must make amends, or else I may as well gut my love, and myself if it comes to it. I will undo this hateful imperfection of his eyes. And, gentle Puck, take this transformed scalp from off the head of this bullish swain. Return him to his company and think no more of this night's accidents but as the fierce vexation of a dream. But first I will release my Omegan King." Hannibal leaned in and gently kissed Will's eyelids, taking from them the nectar he had placed there. "Be as thou wast wont to be, see as thou wast wont to see." He spoke quietly, little more than a rumble next to Will's ear. "Now, my Will, wake you, my sweet King."

Will's eyes fluttered open and Hannibal knew he must not yet have his full senses, for instead of a scowl most usual, Will gazed at him with adoration and wonder. They were but inches apart, Hannibal crowding low over him, very close to laying over him altogether should he wish it.



"My King, what visions have I seen! I dreamt I was in love with a bull."

Hannibal smiled gently, though it was no longer amusement at Will's expense, more a placation.

"There lies your love." Hannibal nodded to the sleeping bull.

Will's jaw tightened and the expected scowl arrived. "How came these things to pass?"

Hannibal drew a deep breath, knowing only the truth was possible now, after all these centuries of folly. He looked at Adam, who stood aside the bull, a wistful expression as he studied the slumbering form. An interesting prospect.

"Adam." The sprite looked up, startled from his reverie. "Take off this head and return him."

The strange quirk of a smile preceded the nod Adam gave him, before he pulled the bull-headed mortal from the blossoms, carrying him to his chest like a lover might, as though he weighed nothing.

“Hannibal.” His name was an angry growl in Will’s mouth, drawing his attention back from his servant’s retreating form. “What mischief did you make? And on me no less. Surely there is no love between us at all then.”

It wasn’t a question, and that saddened Hannibal all the more. “I have made a grave mistake.”

“You have made many,” Will huffed.

“Quite true.” Hannibal let a small smile play across his lips, wishing to smooth the crease between Will’s brow but not daring touch him lest he lose a finger for his troubles. “May I apologise first for the most grave? Several centuries ago when we woke together, you told me that you did not find me interesting. My pride was hurt and I took you at your word. I shunned you as a child would, not seeing the truth in your coyness until it was too late to repair. Every time we have come together since it has been agony remembering that morning. That breakfast we shared after our first night of passion together. And each since I have wanted to make you mine, but… it has never been my right to claim you Will. A treasure cannot be claimed or it as good as theft. It must be earned, it must be won, it must be given and I have done a poor job of deserving such. But if you-”

“Shut up Hannibal.” Will growled against his lips as the omega pulled him into a deep kiss. He pressed Will into the sweet blossoms and moaned his delight into the kiss so freely bestowed.

Scene Six

The Wood. Will’s Encampment on the Embankment.

In one smooth motion, Will simultaneously pulled down the canopy above his bed of blossom, and his alpha.

And Hannibal *was* his, bonded or not.

Hannibal continued to kiss him with more passion than he had ever shown before, at least other than that first night they had been together. He kissed as though he were utterly free to do so, which of course, he was.

“I wasn’t playing hard to get,” Will admitted, pushing Hannibal back a little so he could pant out the words. “When I said I did not find you interesting, I was terrified by how strong my feelings were for you. I was young and did not know how to deal with such overwhelming love and devotion as that you had shown me. And then you took it from me because you decided I really wasn’t interested. Everything you have given me since has been a poor facsimile.”

Hannibal rested his forehead against Will’s, his breath also issuing forth short and ragged.

“I am such a fool to have taken it as a slight. I should have seen your true meaning.”

“I think you did.” Will captured Hannibal’s eyes with his own - a soft but admonishing look there. “I think you were just as overwhelmed and found the excuse you needed to retreat.”

Hannibal cocked his brow and studied Will for a moment; the truth in it was obvious.

“What fools we have been. All these years finding ourselves in each other’s beds and every time brushing it off as nothing more. But I know Will, I see - I see that you long for me as much as I long for you. Let me take you, and make you mine as I should have done so very long ago.”

Will let out a shuddering breath, nodding as he pressed his lips back to Hannibal's.

But before the alpha had the chance to deepen it, Will pulled back once more.

"What of Abigail?" He needed to know she had only ever been a pawn, that Hannibal relinquished all claim on her. Abigail - their latest feud and the one that might finally bring them together.

"She is yours, Will. I will lay no claim to her. Unless… unless you wish me to. If you'll let me, we can be her fathers as you have suggested."

Will let out a heavy sigh, his chest heaving and heart thundering. There was yet still years ahead that he might bear Hannibal a child, but these previous centuries lost were still weighing heavy. The times they might have had a child of their own but had been at war with each other and themselves were painful to think on. Abigail felt like a salve to that wound.

Will nodded, trembling with need, but aware enough to add, "No more games. Take me now or lose me forever."

Hannibal's breath came out as a shudder, and he nodded, clearly unable to form words. Will couldn't help but whimper at the prospect of the promise before them.

He took a breath, waiting in that moment for it all to fall apart, for Hannibal to leave. For his ardency to change and make clear that he had no more intention now than he had the many other times they had been together.

But there was no change. It didn't come. Instead Hannibal whispered sweet words in the most ancient fae, nuzzled at his scent gland and kissed him with unbridled passion.

"I should have made you mine when the moon was young," Hannibal muttered as he began to worship Will's body.

Slowly, tenderly, he pulled away each bloom that had moved to cover Will. His hands then gently loosened and pulled away the delicate robe Will wore, until it pooled around him on the bed of blossoms.

"My treasure. My darling boy." Hannibal's words were breathed across his skin as the alpha lowered himself down Will's body. He sucked kisses into Will's chest, his hands framing its slight plumpness. He nuzzled the dusting of hair from Will's navel to pelvis as Will moaned, unable to hold back the pleasure and emotions that Hannibal brought forth. Allowing himself to feel them wholly and completely for the first time since their first coupling.

"Hannibal." Will whispered his name as reverently as the alpha treated his body, allowing Hannibal to explore him utterly.

Hannibal's mouth closed over Will's omegan sex. It was hard and wanting, and he alternated between sucking and licking. Moving downward until Will's hardness dropped from his mouth and the alpha began to nuzzle and tongue at his most intimate centre.

Will keened, arching so that the tongue driving into him was forced deeper.

"Alpha…" The word came out as a moan. A plea.

He was sure Hannibal knew exactly what Will longed for, because he was sure Hannibal had longed for it just as passionately.

Hannibal moved smoothly back up his body, with a gentle haste that allowed him to place further kisses along the way.

“My omega,” he whispered before moving his lips to Will’s.

Will whimpered, parting his legs as he tasted himself on Hannibal’s tongue.

The alpha settled between his thighs, and Will could feel but not see the hands that moved deftly to release Hannibal from his clothes before pressing himself to Will’s waiting entrance.

Will was panting heavily as Hannibal drew back, his hands once more moving up. He rested upon his elbows as he framed his hands around Will’s face, studying his features. For a brief moment Will wondered if he was looking for some sign of reluctance or inconsistency, but his usually unwavering expression broke into one of awe and rapture.

They had never been this intimate before; as many times as their bodies had been together, this was something deeper. Will moved his own hands up, snaking one behind Hannibal’s neck whilst the other gripped at the back of Hannibal’s shirt, flexing there as though trying to keep a tether to this world.

Their eyes locked and breaths mingled as Hannibal slowly pushed into Will. Both of them trembled and clung to each other as the alpha began to gently thrust - gliding back and forth in a way that had both of them dizzy with pleasure.

“Hannibal… my alpha.” Will breathed the words almost into Hannibal’s mouth as it hovered above his own.

Hannibal whimpered in response, the desperate noise crushing Will’s heart as though it were in a vice. Or perhaps it had just swelled so much in that moment that it pushed against his ribcage in an effort to break free from his chest.

“Knot me,” Will pleaded.

With a grunt, Hannibal lowered his face to Will’s throat, nuzzling along to his scent gland as he rocked into Will at an increasing pace. Will felt every movement and revelled in it, as well as in the anticipated pleasure of what was to come. Of being finally knotted and-

Everything went white and Will cried out as his body shook through a climax that had been suddenly triggered by nothing more than Hannibal’s teeth at his neck. They grazed over his scent gland, tracing the area and seeking to find the perfect spot for a bonding bite.

“Hannibal!” Will cried his name, sobbing with the ripples of pleasure that coursed through him. His whole body shook in a way it never had before.

“I will have you wring as much pleasure from this as I possibly can, my love,” Hannibal growled against his ear.

The threat, the promise, had Will sobbing all the more, too incoherent in that moment to answer with anything other than multitudes of *yes alpha.*

As the climax shuddered to an end, Will's body went from tight and rigid with release, to relaxed and pliant in the afterglow of his orgasm. His head lolled back on the blossoms and his breaths came in shallow huffs as Hannibal drove into his supple form.

Will felt Hannibal's hands frame his face completely again, only aware in that moment that at some point they had dropped away.

"Will, my king, my world. I love you." Hannibal's eyes were locked with his as he spoke, and Will was too pleasured to respond with more than a nod of his head and another short sob.

Hannibal buried his face once more, this time with clear purpose. His teeth worried Will's neck but remained in the same place, the location he had chosen for his bonding bite. His intent was clear and Will could feel another climax welling. His omegan cock, already once spent, grew hard once more - trapped between them as Hannibal rocked his hips in controlled and deep thrusts that barely pulled out. Each one pressed his knot tighter and tighter to Will until he was sobbing all the more and babbling pleading words.

"Yes, Hannibal, please. I love you. I've always loved you." Were he entirely with his wits, Will might have followed with a barb regarding how much of that love Hannibal deserved, but as it was he was lost to the moment.

Hannibal cried out as he pulled back and thrust deeper once, then twice before Will opened fully and Hannibal's knot was enveloped within him.

In that same moment the alpha sank his teeth into Will's neck, sealing them together in a way his knot never could as they both cried out their pleasure and climaxed in unison.

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They had spent many hours tied in their love - an unspoken agreement between them to slow time and savour the sensation. All throughout they had explored each other with tender hands and mouths. Hannibal had ghosted his fingers lovingly over Will's body, savouring it in a way he had never indulged in before, never felt the right to. But now Will was his omega, in more than just desire.

In those hours, several times, Hannibal touched Will in such a way as to bring him to orgasm once more. The sensation of his omega's body responding to him was intoxicating, and it was well that they had slowed time or else he would happily remain this way and miss the Duke's wedding. Such a small consideration now, but without the nuptials having brought them to this place together, they might not have finally settled.

Each round of pleasure for Will had resulted in more for himself, and Hannibal was near exhausted from having filled his omega time and time over so that his belly swelled lightly in anticipation of perhaps carrying Hannibal's offspring. As his knot shrank and he slipped from Will, the essence of their love soiling the blossoms as he did so, Hannibal lightly caressed Will's belly.

He knew that Will had never taken another's seed in this way, nor had he allowed himself to be knotted. The thought made his chest ache in the best possible way. This was always going to happen, they had been foolish to ignore it for so long.

Hannibal curled against Will, nuzzling against the mating bite that was already beginning to scar. Will, in his exhaustion, didn't stir more than a little and Hannibal smiled against his warm flesh.

The alpha watched a blossom fall from the canopy, floating toward them in the slowest motion - an action that should take moments instead stretching out to infinity as Hannibal kept time on their side. He would let Will sleep, hold time so that it mattered nothing how long he needed to rest. And when he woke he would take him again, and this time he would have Will bite him - seal their love for all to see so that there could be no doubt that he belonged wholly and willingly to his omega.

Epilogue

The Duke's Palace. A Wedding.

Will's hand on his, Hannibal led their joined retinue into the frivolity, unseen and untouched by the mortals as they shimmered in the half-reality caught between the mortal and fae worlds. The connection would fade soon and the two worlds would once more separate. Hannibal could not regret that their reunion had taken place here - these mortally fashioned forms were exquisite to mate in. A sensuality wholly different from that which could be found in the fae world. Though the joy of *those* explorations lay ahead of them.

Perhaps Will felt the same, for when he looked over at his mate he caught him grinning to himself and eyeing the scar Hannibal now sported over his scent gland. Their eyes met for a moment and the grin was shared - a flutter of electricity between them as their mortal-styled forms briefly gave way enough for the natural energy of the fae to hum between them. A promise of more to come.

In the end, Hannibal had to drag his eyes from Will's radiant form, lest he feel compelled to take him again with no mind to their surroundings.

Movement caught Hannibal's eye as the mortals took to dancing, and chief amongst them the four lovers that he had given good grace to.

"What is this, mischievous sprite! You told me you fixed the error you made." Hannibal didn't know whether to be angry or amused as the two women and two men took to the dance coupled as they were.

"I did sire, I fixed it perfectly. Love abounds in these parts as you may have noticed. For all their folly, I looked into their hearts, knowing as I do so well that tongues can be liars. This is what I saw." With a proud smile, Adam swept his arm before the congregated dancers.

There, those Hannibal knew named as Brian and Jimmy gazed lovingly at each other, and Margot and Alana mirrored this fully - it was clear to all that Adam was right. Not that Hannibal would ever risk telling him so. So instead he gave a noncommittal grunt and a curt nod, even as Will let out a hearty laugh.

Hannibal stole the laughter into his own mouth, enjoying the delight of his king, before he swept him to the dancefloor.

*

"If we shadows have offended, think but this, and all is mended. That you have but slumber'd here while these visions did appear. And this weak and idle theme, no more yielding but a dream. Gentles, do not reprehend: if you pardon, we will mend. And, as I am an honest Puck, if we have unearned luck, now to 'scape the serpent's tongue. We will make amends ere long, else the Puck a liar call."

Adam smiled as he spoke, his words unheard by the lovers as they made their way from the great hall and to their new marital beds. The frivolities had ended, the last of the guests and entertainers were moving slowly off.

Adam found himself smiling at the once bull-headed man, who now aimlessly wandered - having lost his company of fellow actors early on.

He blundered and blustered and was everything disagreeable, and yet Adam was tempted to make use of the time their worlds were still conjoined, by loving the mortal in a way only a sprite could. Perhaps he would even steal the oaf away with him to that other realm if he was pleased enough to do so. And from the cut of his garments, Adam considered he might well be at that.

“So, good night unto you all. Give me your hands, if we be friends, and Adam shall restore amends.”

Adam chuckled to himself, the last farewell to the departing lovers, before he turned to the mortal man who made a fair bull. Yes, he would definitely consider stealing this one away, to enjoy the company and pleasures of a mischievous fae.

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